

# INDEX TO CINEASTE, VOL. XXVI

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the United States at the headquarters of Mobutu before the coup is noted by a tight shot of a diplomatic license plate with an American flag. While Lumumba's actual death at the hands of his African enemies gave the United States what would later be termed plausible deniability, the 1975 release of the Church Committee's investigation into the activities of the CIA revealed that the agency's director Allen Dulles termed Lumumba another Castro. And as with Castro, the CIA formulated plots to kill the Congolese leader, dispatching one agent to Leopoldville with poison that could be placed in Lumumba's toothpaste.

The rage of Africans against the forces of colonization and how the colonizers were often able to divide the Congolese is apparent in the film. And this rage is captured in the film's violence, which is reminiscent of the ideas put forward by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*. A regeneration through violence is suggested in the film's opening credits and in its concluding scene. Still photographs of Western colonizers exploiting Africa's resources and brutalizing its people provide a graphic background for the opening credits, while the film concludes with two Europeans dismembering the corpse of Lumumba and burning his remains. As the fire destroys what is left of Lumumba's body, the screen is soon engulfed by the fire, evoking the idea that the flames ignited by Lumumba and other third world patriots will someday burn brightly and lead us into a better world. Yet, whether we are approaching this brave new world in sub-Saharan Africa remains most problematic today. Although Mobutu has been toppled, genocide, political instability, AIDS, and continuing economic exploitation remain the legacies of colonialism.

Westerners and particularly Americans need to better understand how the Cold War and policies of interventionism have antagonized and subjugated many people in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. The life and death of Patrice Lumumba is an important part of this story and deserves to be told. Though well-intentioned, Peck's political film fails to provide this understanding. While viewers of Lumumba are left with a sense of anger and betrayal, this emotional response is divorced from any clear comprehension or explanation of the political and economic motives for Lumumba's murder. Lumumba is portrayed as a martyr in the film, but a martyr to what cause is less than clear.

In a world that seems increasingly driven by emotional responses, an understanding of root causes is essential. Rather than simply waving the flag, we need to consider why so many in the world perceive the United States as a power thwarting political, economic, and cultural independence. Unfortunately, filmmaker Raoul Peck has missed an opportunity to better educate the American public and the West as to these root causes and perceptions.—Ron Briley

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*Cineaste: A Cumulative Index*, covering all our issues from 1967 through 2001, will be published early in 2002.

## Contributors

**Paul Arthur** teaches literature and film at Montclair State University ... **Pat Aufderheide** is professor and director of the Center for Social Media in the School of Communication of American University and author of *The Daily Planet: A Critic on the Capitalist Cultural Beat* (University of Minnesota Press) ... **Saul Austerlitz** is a graduate student in the Cinema Studies Department at New York University ... **John Belton** teaches film in the English Department at Rutgers University ... **Ron Briley** teaches a history through film course at Sandia Preparatory School and has written for *The History Teacher*, *Film & History* and *Literature/Film Quarterly* ... **Carl Bromley** has written about politics and cinema for *Counter Punch*, *In These Times* and *The Nation* ... **Janet Cutler** coordinates the Film Program at Montclair State University and is coeditor (with Phyllis Klotman) of *Struggles for Representation: African American Documentary Film and Video* ... **Thomas Doherty** is Assistant Professor of American Studies at Brandeis University and author of several books, most recently *Pre-Code Hollywood* (Columbia University Press) ... **Grover Furr** is an Associate Professor in the English Department at Montclair State University ... **Dan Georgakas** is coeditor of *The Encyclopedia of the American Left* ... **Rahul Hamid** is a doctoral candidate at New York University's Department of Cinema Studies ... **Ryan Krivoshey** is a marketing and publicity Associate at First Run/Icarus Films ... **Phillip Lopate** is an essayist, novelist and professor at Hofstra University ... **Adrian Martin** is currently writing books on Terrence Malick, Brian De Palma and the *Mad Max* series ... **Martha Nochimson** is the author of *The Passion of David Lynch: Wild at Heart in Hollywood* and her latest book, *Screen Couple Chemistry*, will be published in Fall 2002 ... **Richard Porton** is the author of *Film and the Anarchist Imagination (Verso)* ... **Leonard Quart** is coauthor (with Albert Auster) of *American Film and Society Since 1945*, now in its third edition (Greenwood) ... **George Rafael** writes for *Salon.com*, *Art Review* and *Archipelago* ... **Jonathan Rosenbaum** is film critic for *The Chicago Reader* and author of numerous books, most recently *Movie Wars* (A Cappella Books) ... **Robert Sklar**, author of *Film: An International History of the Medium*, among many other books, teaches Cinema Studies at New York University ... **Clifford Thompson**, the Editor of *Current Biography*, has an essay in *The Best American Movie Writing 1999* ... **Dave Wagner** is coauthor with Paul Buhle of *A Very Dangerous Citizen: Abraham Lincoln Polonsky and the Hollywood Left* (2001) and the forthcoming *Radical Hollywood* (The New Press) ... **Dennis West** teaches Hispanic film and culture at the University of Idaho ... **Linda Williams** directs the Program in Film Studies at the University of California, Berkeley and her most recent book is *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson* (Princeton University Press).

